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ABSTRACT

Information on the development and implementation of a parent education project in the Campbell Union School District (California) is presented. The project, consisting of a series of parent workshops at school sites, is described as an opportunity for parents to share their 6th, 7th, or 8th grade child's learning experience in a family life education course through discussion of such topics as the material presented in the child's class, student interest and response to the materials, and parent follow-through at home, particularly in relation to psycho-sexual development concerns. Information included in this publication covers: (1) highlights of the first planning session of the nine participating teachers; (2) techniques used by the teachers in getting the first parent meeting off to a good start; (3) a list of the films used in the class; (4) some effective group dynamics techniques used with the parents; (5) a list of the topics discussed in the course; and (6) a list of the topics discussed with the parents. An excerpt from a letter sent to parents regarding the project, evaluative comments by parents and teachers, and a list of participating teachers are also included. (JW)

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THE IDEA AND ITS BEGINNING

It was in the fall of 1980 that Campbell Union School District applied for a grant from the Office of Family Planning for a project entitled Family Life Education - A Shared Learning Experience.

The concept of this proposal had been discussed among a few Family Life Education teachers in the District and it was decided that it would be worth a try to make an application.

The idea was simple. We would invite parents of students in Family Life Education classes to participate in a series of workshops at various schools to hear from their child's teacher about the content of the course, and to discuss topics of mutual interest regarding the growth and development of 6th, 7th and 8th grade students. We would encourage family participation by hosting a dinner prior to the first meeting and arranging for child care while the parents were meeting with the teachers.

We envisioned a sharing of information about what had happened or was about to happen in the classroom. We would show the films that had been used, share the classroom materials and discuss, with the parents, the same topics that the students were involved in.

What about teachers? Would there be several who would be willing to take on this extra responsibility? After the grant was approved, we sent out a letter to 6th, 7th and 8th grade Family Life Education teachers, telling them of the grant approval and asking for their voluntary involvement. Nine responded positively and became the nucleus of the project.

The following is an exerpt from the letter that went out in March of 1981:

> Parents of 6th, 7th and 8th grade Family Life Education (FLE) students are the target group of this project. These students will take a 4-week unit in FLE during the 1981-82 school year. Since our District Parent Advisory Committee on FLE has established parent education as one of their priorities, this project's objectives blend with that emphasis. The project will provide the opportunity for parents to share their child's learning experience in FLE. Activities include: 1) Weekly (4) evening classes for parents of students in the FLE program conducted by their child's teacher. These sessions will be located at the school sites selected for the project. Class content will include: a) discussion of material presented in child's class during prior week, including books read, films viewed, etc,; b) discussing student interest and response; c) discussing "follow-through" at home - particularly in regard to communicating with their children about psycho-sexual development. 2) A family evening beginning with dinner provided at a nominal cost. Following dinner, parents will spend two hours with their child's teacher, and on occasion, other consultants. Babysitting and/or a youth activity program will be provided. Objectives will be evaluated by observation of attendance, attitudinal surveys and a pre-post test measuring cognitive information gained in the 8-hour workshop.

During the same period of time, the project was being discussed by the District's Parent Advisory Committee on Family Life Education. They were interested in the ways in which the program would be advertised, how parents would be urged to attend, the dinner and child care arrangements, and the general logistics of putting on such an ambitious project.

The voluntary teachers represented 5 schools, so principals had to be communicated with, dates set and arrangements made for all the details that seemed to be in abundance at the outset.

It was time for the first planning session with the teachers - October, 1981. Teachers were invited to meet with the Project Director after school and then have dinner together to conclude the session. This plan proved to be a popular way to conduct future planning sessions because teachers, generally, did not want to be released from their classrooms too often, and this provided adequate planning time plus a complimentary dinner at a local restaurant. This last feature was particularly valuable as a social outlet, and, as the project progressed, drew the group together very closely as they planned, shared experiences, and enjoyed a meal together.

Meeting together the first time, the group was unsure of itself and were questioning what they had gotten into. This first session was spent in brainstorming all the possible ideas that could be used. Films, books, topics were reviewed in an attempt to have a wealth of available ideas to use. But what about group dynamics? What happens first with 20 or 30 parents sitting in a room? How does discussion get started? At this point the group decided to invite someone in for the second session who could give ideas on working with groups. Diane Jensen was contacted and she joined the teachers at the next meeting and demonstrated ideas for "breaking the ice" and getting the parent group involved. Mrs. Jensen is a registered nurse who has consulted with the District before and has led workshops for us. She is particularly skilled in working with groups on the topics of sex education, communication and parenting skills. Again, dinner ended the evening and it was obvious that enthusiasm was being generated and a mutual purpose was emerging.

The time had arrived for the first teacher to launch the program in her school. The other 8 were anxiously awaiting the results in the hopes of having more information to use in their own sessions. Part II of this report will detail the expereiences of each teacher and school as the program progressed from December 1981 through May of 1982.

SCHOOL LEVEL MEETINGS

Getting Started - The First Meeting

Various techniques were used by each of the teachers in getting the first meeting off to a good start. Participants introduced themselves, a history of Family Life Education in the District was given and the purposes of the grant proposal were discussed. Then a number of "ice-breakers" were used to force involvement and get discussion going. In one case a "nerf" ball was thrown from person to person who were then asked why they were there and what they expected out of the sessions. In another case butcher paper was put on the wall and parent expectations were written down. In one school the teachers read passages from "Listen to Us" - a book written by kids which pointed out the need for good communication and information about sex and growing up. Sometimes parents were put in groups of three or four where they shared information on three questions:

- What really scares me about talking to my child about sex?
- What was one piece of information about sex that I received as a youngester?
- When I talk in a group the thing that frightens me the most is_____.

In other cases 3" x 5" cards were passed out and parents were asked to respond in writing to the questions:

- Name one thing that your parents told you about sex or name one thing you wish your parents had told you about sex.
- What is one thing that you have told your child about sex? Name one thing you'd like to tell your child.

The cards were collected and read to the total group.

Materials - Films

Each teacher shared the books, models and audio-visual aids that were used in the classroom. Several films were used to generate discussion. These were:

Making a Decision is...	I'm Sorry Baby
Cipher in the Snow	Am I Normal?
Johnny Lingo	Human Growth
Up Pill, Down Pill	VD Attack Plan
Feminine Mistake	Then One Year
Woman-Child	Inside-Out - Love Susan

Techniques - Group Dynamics

Small groups and large groups were used to share information prompted by the teacher or brought up by the group. In one session family responses to common experiences were discussed: i.e. Being a better listener in the home. In another school a homework assignment was given. It related to having a discussion between parent and child about sex. It contained the following questions:

When did the discussion take place?

Where did it take place?

Who was present?

What was your ice-breaker?

Were you anxious?

Did your child appear anxious?

Specifically, what did you discuss?

How did you feel about this discussion?

How do you think your child felt?

Any comments?

Key Topics

Each of the teachers shared the content of their Family Life Education classes and related pertinent information about student comments that would be of interest to the parents. The topics revolved around the broad areas of:

- Decision making
- Self-esteem
- Drugs
- Human growth - sex education
- Veneral disease (junior high)

Some of the topics that were raised and discussed were the following:

- Birth control
- Values education
- The difference between sex and love
- Abortion
- Homosexuality
- Parenting skills - opening up communication

Results

Teachers

The following statements represent the feelings of each of the teachers after completing their meetings:

- The whole program was a most worthwhile undertaking. I feel I gained valuable experience in developing communication skills and in helping parents and students gain some of these same skills. I recommend it highly and wish that all sixth grade students and teachers could become involved.

- The Family Life workshop experience has enabled me to pursue my goals of teaching Family Life to a further point than I have ever had an opportunity to do previous to this year. Family Life should, as the name implies, include the entire family not just the teacher and student. This year we were able to draw together all units of the family. Parents were able to relate to their children and their sexual changes at a more realistic level than otherwise possible. Parents were grateful for the opportunity to follow the program as it proceeded and to carry-over to the home, topics we had discussed in class. On a personal note, this program has also given me the opportunity to develop new and closer relationships with my fellow Family Life teachers.

- After all the apprehension of not knowing how parents would react, I felt that I had experienced much personal growth from participating in the FLE workshops. I felt a closeness with the parents involved in the workshops as well as the other teachers involved in the program. This closeness developed from the opening up of our private selves and a sharing of ideas on ways of helping our children develop a healthy outlook on their lives.

- An opportunity to share a positive partnership with the parents of our junior high school. Parents need the opportunity to share in a supportive atmosphere, the mutual concerns and problems they are experiencing with their 12-13 year old youngsters. Although some concerns were unresolved, at least the parents were given the opportunity to share similar feelings with their youngster's teachers in a rewarding and growing experience.

- At the sixth grade level, I felt the program was the most successful of all my fourteen years of teaching the FLE program. This was the ONLY time parents were so fully involved.

  The meetings with the parents were an invaluable experience for me because the parents participated so willingly and their responses to the program were all positive. They opened up to each other and shared their need for communication and support from other parents.

  One need was to learn the skill of communicating effectively with their offspring, and the other was the need to improve decision making within the family.

  From listening to my group, I realize that they are not always sure about themselves as parents, and they feel alone and weak when setting limits or stating expectations for their adolescent children.

  I truly believe the school system should sense this need and continue to plan educational experiences for effective parenting training.

  The implications in such a program are far reaching.

  Let's help keep parents out of trouble! After all - we all know the book didn't fall out with the child at birth!

- At the junior high level I feel the parent program was an unqualified success. There seems to be a strong need among the parents to communicate with each other about "where their kids are at" and get feedback from me. As for me - it was a totally rewarding experience. I got more than I gave - and I highly recommend it to others.

- The FLE workshops were such outstanding experiences for me this year. In the past, the FLE program always brought my class together, made for more lasting friendships, and created a more unique atmosphere. To get this from the children and parents alike was doubly pleasurable.

- The FLE workshops gave me the opportunity of establishing a rapport with parents that I otherwise would not have experienced. What better way to serve the needs of children than to have parents and teachers working together - this was truly the high point of my year.

Parents

A random sample of parents was conducted and the following comments are representative of their responses:

- This is a worthwhile program in every way. The program brought home and school closer, giving us an opportunity to participate as a family in a learning experience. Great program! Great teachers!

- Opened the door to family discussion. Our son feels more relaxed to ask questions and we feel more confident in our answers. I wish we had this opportunity with our older child.

- The greatest single lesson was that my daughter may often feel like not sharing her feelings/thoughts with me and that's ok. It doesn't mean something is wrong - only that she has a right to privacy of feelings. This is different from problems that require discussion.

- My daughter asks questions and talks on subjects she would never have discussed before this class.

- I feel that the FLE classes helped to promote more open communication in our family. For example, although my husband did not attend any of these sessions, he did go and preview one of the films. In turn, this gave him the confidence, courage or whatever to have his first discussion concerning sex with our daughter - until then it had been a taboo subject with him. Thanks.

- I had a daughter who kept all this to herself and if it hadn't been for these workshops I would have had no idea what she had seen or heard. At least I can bring subjects up that I learned and she knows she can always come to me for discussions or help.

- The meetings provided an easy door opener for further discussions at home, an opportunity to impart my moral values on to my son. The fact that he knows that I see the same movies he does, makes it easier for him to ask me questions about things which he does not understand.

- The fact that the children know I care and am aware of the facts of life help with their trust in me as an effective parent. Thank you so very much for this chance to bring my family closer on such a delicate subject!

In summary, this project exceeded all of our expectations. It provided a unique service to our parent community, enhanced the relationship between home and school, and encouraged our Family Life Education teachers in their commitment to the program for the future.

FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION - A SHARED LEARNING EXPERIENCE

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